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THE PASSION OF
HERMAN



CHARLES NELSON PACE

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THE PASSION OF HERMAN

A Story of Oberammergau

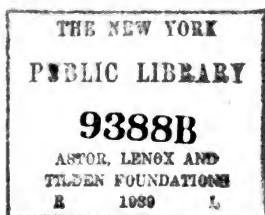
BY
CHARLES NELSON ^{or} PACE



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"Our crosses are hewn from different trees,
But we all must have our Calvaries.
We may climb the hill from a different side,
But each must go up to be crucified.
As we climb the hill another may share
The dreadful load that our shoulders bear;
But the costliest sorrow is all our own,
For on the summit we bleed alone."

—FREDERICK LAWRENCE KNOWLES.

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IN EXPLANATION

THIS little story grew out of a visit to Oberammergau in 1910. Its purpose is not to exploit the Passion Play. Oberammergau is used as the setting and the Passion Play as the occasion to describe a spiritual struggle. We are all expected to be interpreters of Christ. Herman is a type, and therefore his experience contains a message for a larger audience than those who might be interested in the Passion Play.

THE AUTHOR.

I

"IF THOU KNEWEST THE GIFT"

SPRING had come again into the little valley of the Ammer. Though the encompassing crags on east and south and west lifted an unfriendly barrier against her approach, and the open valley to the north still welcomed an occasional gust of the departing winter. Snow banks beneath the pines hid like stealthy foemen in the shadows, as though to hold their possessions with icy fingers. But sunny noons at last compelled the surrender. The birds and flowers began to appear, sweet harbingers of returning warmth. And now spring seemed to dance over the ragged rim of



those mountain crests and travel in a riot of beauty and perfume, of gaiety and song, of activity and joy into the village of Oberammergau.

The herds browsed each day on the tender grass that was fast transforming the meadows' barrenness to beauty, the birds filled the hillsides with music, the children shouted for the very joy of living. Throughout the village streets men and women went about their work with animated spirit, for all had caught the contagion of the glorious days. Even as a thousand little rivulets of the mountainside, reluctantly released from springs and crevices, swelled the volume of the Ammer, that now ran swiftly in its course, rippling over the stones and purling about the roots of reeds and bending trees, murmuring ever, so from all nature came the mysterious



influences that swelled the stream of joyousness.

"Why are you so silent, my Herman?" said a middle-aged wood carver as he cast a glance toward his apprentice. Through an open window came the sunshine and the south wind. The room where they worked was fragrant with the aroma of freshly cut wood. Along the sides were numerous examples of their handicraft—mantlepieces of intricate design, hunting scenes, clocks, and such sacred emblems as the Good Shepherd, the Madonna, and the crucifix. It was a crucifix that Herman held in his hand when the master spoke to him. He did not answer at once. He seemed absorbed in his work. His graving tool touched an outstretched palm of that crucifix and fashioned the wound and the nail. Over his task

he bent a thoughtful face, and his eyes were luminous.

"It was a great sacrifice He made," said Herman.

"What?—Ah, O yes! a great sacrifice it was," responded the master, for, looking up, he saw the face of Herman suffused with tenderness as he held the crucifix before him.

"I sometimes feel a revulsion when I thrust the knife or chisel into the body, as though I were a party to His suffering, a criminal along with those who crucified Him. When I think of His death and its meaning, it seems terrible to add to His pain in ——"

"Tut! Tut! Nonsense. It is only a piece of wood. When it is finished we hang it there on the wall, then a year hence the tourists come. Some pretty lass from America admires it, buys it. We

take her silver and so at last comes reward for our toil."

"But to her it is an object of veneration and worship. She says her prayers before it. It is the symbol of our holy faith. It portrays the world's greatest tragedy."

"Yes, but why grow morose? You have been so disconsolate. You do not talk as once you did. Our shop is silent. What is on your mind? Think of the wonderful spring. It has come back. While I was spading the garden last evening my little Gretchen came running to me with a bunch of cowslips she had picked along the river bank. It was good to see them."

Then master and apprentice bent again to their tasks. Silence fell once more upon the room, save as the tools were deftly turned and drawn upon the wood, answering to

an inner ideal of beauty and truth, and destined finally to present thought and emotion in the speechless symbols of the Church.

"A year hence—it seems a long time between the performances of the Passion Play," spoke Herman.

"Ten years is quite a while," was the answer.

"I wonder who will take the principal parts. The elections—ah, what uncertainty! It seems to me there should be a better way, especially to choose the Christus."

"How? Tell me."

"Well, the character. I know that appearance counts for much and that dramatic ability is important, but does not an election to the chief place by one's neighbors open the possibility of wrong motives entering in? Why not choose for the Christus the one who is most

like Him in traits of character—sympathy, helpfulness, love?”

“Who would determine this?”

“The priest. Does he not know us all? Can he not tell who is most faithful in prayer and practice? Does he not hold the secrets of the confessional?”

The master laid his work aside and came near his young friend. The years had established a close bond between them.

“My Herman,” he said, “I might have known. Was there ever a youth of our village that did not at some time cherish the great ambition? I had it once. How fondly I hoped to take the chief role! But the election fell to another,” and at the memory of that disappointment his head fell on his breast. After a time he continued: “Probably I shall not have a part again—unless

it be in the rabble. But you, Herman, can attain the highest. I have thought I would speak of it some time. Of course there are others mentioned, and as the time draws near we can tell how the election will probably go."

"Do you think me capable?"

"Capable and worthy, my dear friend. You are young and strong. Your part in the last cantata was so well performed that no doubt is left as to your ability. Your voice is rich, your presence commanding. You have many friends. Some would like to see you thus honored, and personally I feel you would bring honor to us. I am speaking as one who loves you. Therefore, lest you think too intently of it, remember we have others, and—even some of your friends think you can wait another decade. Be patient, Her-

man. Do not let this ambition occupy you too much. You have been silent and solemn for many days. Now we understand each other. Come, let us take a breath of air," and opening the door he drew his lungs full of the invigorating, pine-laden atmosphere that blew down from the mountains.

Herman leaned back, meditative. Evidently some problem was perplexing him. As he tilted back, his head rested on his clasped hands, his bared forearms showing each cord and muscle. His face was one of refinement and his features were beautifully formed. It was a face that expressed intelligence and feeling. About the eyes there lingered a mystic light. Rugged of form and rare of feature, Herman was indeed an unusual specimen of physical manhood. There was about him an

individuality that inspired confidence.

He was known to be deeply religious. And yet about him too was a certain element of unconscious pride, as though the religious nature had not made complete conquest. Somewhat assertive and always communicative, his late disposition to silence and to a somewhat exaggerated devotion had not passed the master-carver unnoticed. This was why Herman's comment on the crucifix had been turned somewhat flippantly by the master, and, now that the secret of his ambitions was known, why he was tempted out into the glories of spring.

Perhaps it was the wonder-working spring with its ever-recurring miracle of new life that had wrought the change in Herman. Perhaps the awakening of new ambitions came

with the quickened pulse. Who has been able to trace the subtle influences that emanate from the thing we call environment? So numerous are the unseen forces that play upon human life that it is impossible to designate each and mark the limit of their scope.

Herman had been somewhat surprised that the master had detected his secret thought, when he had only spoken of the manner of selecting the players for the Passion Play. His first impulse was to disclaim his master's inference, to tell him he was mistaken. But he was too sincere and honest to deny the fact. Now the master knew. He could be trusted. Herman knew him for a loving friend and safe counselor. It was true that a great desire had taken possession of him to present the part of Christus in the coming

Play. He had for many days dreamed secretly of how he would present each scene. He had pictured the gaze of the multitudes and their breathless admiration. He had imagined himself the cynosure of all eyes—not only in his village, but in all Christendom. So enraptured was he in the contemplation of it that temporarily he forgot that another might be selected for the honor. Whenever this possibility did present itself he was irritated. It had set him to devising some means by which the honor might come to him alone. Could anything be plainer than that the part of Christ should be presented by one who bore more perfectly than any other the character of Christ? Surely this would determine it. So he had given himself to meditation and prayer. In this ambition he was altogether sin-

cere. And it was in the utmost sincerity that he now recalled to the master's mind the problem of selection.

"What do you think of selecting the players according to character?"

The master grew serious.

"Certainly the part of the Christus should be presented by one who has the spirit of Christ. But this rule would compel us to select for Judas one who has the spirit of Judas—and God forbid such should dwell in our village. Do you not remember, Herman, that some who have visited us claim they have seen in all our people a devotion and disposition that has reminded them of the New Testament characters? That should be our longing—so that whoever takes the part of Judas or Pilate or the priests, when at last their robes are laid aside, shall none

the less than those who act as Jesus and the disciples show forth the deep devotion we have for God and the Church when we remember Love's great sacrifice."

And so the day wore on, but Herman was silent and thoughtful.

II

"THE MARKS OF THE
LORD JESUS"

ON the following Sabbath Herman came to the Church for worship. The mellow tones of the bell sent forth the call to prayer. It resounded through the valley, penetrated the mountain recesses, and died away in echoes as soft as the whisper of some spirit from the other world. Forth from their homes the people came, simple in attire and devout in manner. No wayside crucifix was passed unsaluted. No loitering gossip delayed the progress of families to the house of God. Through the winding streets lined with quaint cottages came the worshipers and like a procession passed through the churchyard with its

graves of those who in their time had won a share of life's glories. With reverent mien they entered the portals, moved to their accustomed place, and bowed before the shining altar.

Of all the worshipers that day none were more devout than Herman. His soul was enrapt in meditation and prayer. About him were the village folk, his loved ones and the friends of his youth and his manhood, but he was oblivious of their presence. The voice of the priest rose and fell, the choir chanted their response, but when the people answered to the service, Herman's part was performed mechanically. Before him were burning candles and swinging censer and about him the symbols of Christ's Last Week, but he saw them not. He was looking beyond things material and

symbolic to things spiritual and real. His soul was intent on Christ Himself. His heart longed for a fuller revelation of the divine mystery. It was not the despairing cry "O that I knew where I might find Him" that troubled his mind. He had found Him, and all his life he had known the comfort of Christ's words and influence. It was a hunger for a more perfect acquaintance that possessed the young man's heart. He remembered the saying, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," and he straightway threw open the door of his nature again to the Master and prayed to be so filled with the presence that he might be the human expression of the divine mind, the living interpretation of the Christ spirit.

"And why do you seek this?"

The question fell upon the soul

of Herman like a challenge from heaven. It called him away from his introspection. He started with surprise. It was the pastor's voice now speaking to the flock.

"Do you know what it has meant to the saints to follow Christ? Do you think the blessed martyrs were moved by pride? Can we be moved to faithfulness by any thought of honor or reward? If we are to be interpreters of the Passion of Jesus, then we must be possessed of the spirit of Jesus. O that there might arise among us those who can say with the apostle Paul, 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.' "

"The marks of the Lord Jesus! The marks of the Lord Jesus!"

Over and over again that message repeated itself to Herman. What had been the drift of the pastor's

remarks he could not have told. That ringing question had been laid alongside his own perplexity and the answer had come. If the marks of Jesus were on a man, a man of Oberammergau, then when the Christus was chosen for the Passion Play—why certainly! What could be more plain? It would be the infallible sign to the village folk.

“Father, tell me what you meant by the marks of the Lord Jesus,” said Herman to his pastor when a little later he sought him out alone.

“My appeal, Herman, was for a spiritual conception of our Master’s life. We should imitate our Master’s love and sympathy and service to mankind. And we should seek this not from any ulterior motive, but for His sake.”

“But the marks!” broke in Herman, almost impatiently. “It seems

to me I have heard there was some special significance to these. Does not the Church regard them as physical? What were they like? A faint memory seems to recall this—but you know, Father, I was somewhat dull in my history.”

“Yes, you are thinking of the Church’s doctrine of the stigmata. It is a strange and mysterious sign of the divine favor and has been given to but few,” and his voice was hushed, as though he had a secret to impart. “What I meant to-day, my son, was an imitation of our Master in the qualities of character. But the Church’s belief goes still farther. The marks of Jesus are the marks of His passion—the nail prints in His hands and feet, the spear thrust in His side. We know that Saint Paul closely followed his Master. He said, ‘For

me to live is Christ,' and again, 'I am crucified with Christ.' For his Lord he suffered much, was persecuted and stoned and shipwrecked. There are those who think that when he said, 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus,' he only referred to the bruises and scars of his arduous ministry, but others declare he meant that actually the print of the nails that symbolize Christ's passion was transferred to the palms of his own hands. In this way, God miraculously showed His divine approval of Paul's devotion and put the seal upon him as an apostle and a saint."

"How wonderful!" murmured Herman.

"Yes, wonderful indeed," replied the pastor as he looked into the young man's face, now filled with an unusual interest.

"This strange phenomenon has been visited upon some of the saints. It is not often the stigmata are given, for, you understand, it is a miracle. It is said that Saint Francis of Assisi was thus honored of God. I do not wonder at it. His was a life of remarkable devotion. He renounced the world and all its luxuries. He gave up his riches. He lived in poverty. But his life was full of good deeds. His soul was always moved by the scenes of suffering. He prayed much. And after many years of service, though he was honored by many followers among men, God honored him with the stigmata, the marks of the Lord Jesus. I think it was because he was so much like our blessed Lord. It was in a time of prayer and spiritual exaltation that the miracle was performed. He bore

the marks until his death. Many saw them. I once visited Assisi. Herman, it seemed as though the spirit of the good saint lingered there. I was deeply moved."

"And I am deeply moved now," said Herman. "Pastor, you said this morning you would that there might arise here in Oberammergau some who could say with Paul, 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.' Do you think it possible?"

"Possible?—Yes, 'With God, all things are possible!'"

"I know you have explained to me that you meant we should have the marks of Christ's spirit upon us. And I covet this, as you know. But, O Father"—and Herman's voice broke with emotion—"if I could only be given the stigmata! Do not look surprised. I will tell you

all. For years, as you know, my parents have cherished the hope that some time I might be the Christus in the Passion Play. Their ambitions never meant much to me. I was content with my wood-carving. But in recent years that great ambition has become more to me. I have held it as a secret all my own. As the spring has come and I have thought that only a year hence the Play will be given again, the season at hand when all Christendom will turn its gaze to our village and our Play, the desire has become more intense—it has become a passion. I have tried to live worthy of that great role. As I have imagined myself in each scene and act I have tried to think what the Master must have thought. It has brought me closer to Him. I covet the opportunity of interpreting His sac-

rifice to the world. But the election, pastor—it is so uncertain. There are others who are worthy, I know. Your word would have weight, and I have often wished it was left for the priest to determine. You know us better than we know each other. Forgive me if I seem to be asking too great a favor. Tell me, may I not count on your influence? I know you will help me. And this morning as you have spoken of the marks of the Lord Jesus it has come to me like a great revelation that if through penitence and prayer I could but obtain the stigmata as an evidence of my worthiness to take the part of Christus, there would be none to challenge or question it.”

“Herman, my son,” began the priest, deliberately, as though he would measure each word, “it is a

great thing you ask—and I tell you frankly it is not mine to give. With your ambition I sympathize keenly; with the method you suggest of attaining it, I confess myself in doubt. You already have my word that it is possible; but, Herman, it is a daring venture your faith has undertaken. This I will promise you: I will keep your desire as a sacred secret. I will pray that your soul may be enriched by God's grace daily. And if in His providence there should be given you some token of His favor, I shall rejoice with you. But, but—permit this one word of caution, my son—beware of pride!"

In the evening of that Sabbath day, as the light lifted to the mountain crests and the valley was shrouded with the deepening dusk, Herman might have been seen wend-

ing his way to the Kopfel, clambering up its slopes amid the fresh moist odors of the spring. His face was radiant with a great expectation. There was the joy of victory there. And though the battle was not yet won, his manner was that of one who was sure of his way and hopeful of the outcome. There was no one with him, yet he had no sense of desolation. He was, like his Master, climbing the mountain that he might be alone and that he might pray.

III

"BECAUSE OF HIS IMPORTUNITY"

THE home of Herman was typical of Oberammergau. Father and mother were honest, hard-working, devout. The furnishings were ample for comfort. An air of prosperity, the reward of thrift and economy, permeated the place. It was not only apparent in each room, but the walks and garden outside showed evidence of care. Domestic love was regnant there.

They were faithful attendants at the village church. They accepted its teachings without question, though their religious life was somewhat traditional and the discharge of its duties somewhat formal. Like the other residents of this valley,

their memories of the past were associated with the Passion Play, and in the great crowds that came each decennial year they saw a financial opportunity. Yet their spirit was not commercial. They looked upon the care of the multitudes as an obligation. Growing to manhood in this environment, it was natural for Herman to look upon all preparations for the coming season with unusual interest. His father had performed in a place of some importance a decade ago, he himself had been in several tableaux and in such groupings as summoned a large percentage of the population to fill the stage. The fascination of that summer had never been thrown off wholly, yet his heart had not begun to throb with ambition until that spring. Of course the parents looked upon the stal-

wart form of their son, thought of his religious nature, his popularity, and his talent, and dreamed of the coming days of sure success. Notwithstanding his youth they had heard his name mentioned as a possible Christus, and had been congratulated on the honor that would surely come to them some day. They did not speak of these things to Herman himself. Little did they dream of the plans evolving in Herman's own mind as they saw him come and go from his work at the wood-carver's shop. They observed a certain preoccupation, an increased friendship between himself and the priest, more studiousness, and yet even these did not excite more than passing comment between husband and wife.

It is not surprising that as the days went by Herman's ambition

increased. The way seemed so open, the method of attaining the goal so plausible. What mattered the elections? No committee could fail to be impressed by a miracle. That the miracle itself might be withheld did not deter him. It was possible. He knew his own heart. His pastor had promised his prayers. Others had received the stigmata. Why not he?

To the casual observer Herman's life went on as it had. As he passed along the village streets his friends greeted him, and his own cordial nature was generous in thought and feeling to all he met. He was diligent in his work, and the master saw that while no task was slighted and no day's work marred by moods of silence and brooding, there was still a secret unrevealed. Again and again he caught a strange gleam

in Herman's eye or saw a smile on his face while he worked. But the young man kept his counsel. A snatch of song from the great chorus, the repetition aloud of favorite passages in the Passion Play gave an occasional evidence that Herman's thought was on the coming events.

When alone, however, his soul became aflame with his desire. To interpret the passion of Christ, to bear the marks of His suffering, and thus to compel all the world to look and wonder—this was his consuming purpose. His times of meditation were devoted to searching the Scripture and to introspection. Many times he read the story of that Last Week. Repeatedly he went over the life of Paul. With real diligence he sought out the history of saints and dwelt upon

their piety. He familiarized himself with the Church's doctrine through whose benefits he hoped to win his way to the chief honor of the village. He cultivated habits of thought upon holy things. No way-side crucifix challenged his devotion in vain. Before each symbol of the Church he bowed with an open heart, seeking ever to know the mysteries of the gospel.

Often he climbed to the mountain-side and looked over the beautiful little valley he had known since childhood. There stood the houses along the irregular streets and in their midst arose the spire of the village church. The musical tones of the bell had for generations called the people to worship. Around the one structure the life of the townspeople centered in a peculiar way. There were the shops, the schools

and his home, the surrounding fields and gardens through which the Ammer sang its way. And here were the encompassing mountains with their everlasting message to all who lift their eyes unto the hills. But the Church and what it stood for was the center of the valley's life. However secluded the people might be from the big world of learning, of commerce, and of politics, they felt themselves commissioned to a special task. It was theirs to interpret the Passion of Christ, and so well had this been done each decade that this same busy world laid its task aside, broke into the seclusion of the little valley, received the message, and went away sobered by a new conception of the Great Sacrifice. When Herman thought of these things, the whole landscape took on new meaning, it was suf-

fused with a softer radiance, it became a holy place.

Across these mountains and through the valley armies had marched to settle the disputes of Europe, and thither they might march again. But no war had ever occasioned such an invasion in all the past as the streaming multitudes from all Christendom to witness each decade the performance of the Passion Play. Whatever the motive for their coming, prejudices were forgotten in the charm of the Oberammergau. The very atmosphere was charged with lofty sentiment. Even as of old the tribes went up for their religious festivals to Jerusalem, so this mountain retreat became a place of pilgrimage. Then, too, the coming of the multitudes was not only an act of worship but a recognition of princi-

ple, of integrity. For three centuries they had kept the vow.

Little did Casper Schuler know the far-reaching consequences of his indiscretion, when on that dark night, with the premonition of the plague upon him, he broke through the quarantine that once more he might see his loved ones face to face. What terrible toll the disease had taken for that folly! What wonder the people in despair gathered in their church and called mightily for relief. And when they made their pledge to repeat the Passion of the Lord the scourge was lifted. It was a miracle. God heard and accepted their vow. And now through three centuries the fathers from generation to generation had never wavered in the fulfillment of that pledge. Surely, the coming of the people to witness their per-

formance was a recognition of their integrity and their loyalty to that sacred oath. No matter how these mountains might have once echoed to the tramp of military hosts, the invasion about to take place was a benevolent one and the hosts would come in the name of the Prince of Peace, the scepter of whose kingdom was the cross.

It was with such thoughts as these that Herman strengthened his faith and fed his hope. He knew that the honor he coveted imposed grave responsibility. He realized that the method by which he hoped to achieve it was unusual. What would his friends say if they knew his secret hope? What would the committee say if he should appear before them when the parts were to be assigned? He imagined their open-eyed wonder as he held

before them the "marks" on his outstretched palms—the convincing token of God's selection of him for the chief part. Surely by that sign he would conquer!

And what would the priest say? He would see it first. Because he also knew of the great desire, to him should be given the honor of first seeing the miracle. Was there no way to make sure of it? No—the stigmata must be given. Therefore he prayed, fervently and frequently. Sometimes he would open his eyes after the last "amen" and look at once upon his hands to see if during his devotion the prayer had been answered. He began to study his image in the mirror, each line and each feature, and always with an ideal before him of how Christ appeared. But the final gift must be sent from God—a mir-

acle. Of this he was sure. No artificial device would do. Therefore he prayed expectantly, even though the answer seemed to be postponed.

IV

"ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE"

"GOOD day, Herman. Are you alone?"

It was the cheery greeting of the priest.

"Yes, alone, and thinking of you, Father. The master is out of the shop for a while. Come, have this seat," and Herman with a cordiality not lacking deference gave place to him.

"What! Another crucifix almost done? You work with skill this spring. Let me see," and he took the sacred emblem from Herman's hand and looked at it closely. "Well done!" was his verdict. "You have caught the facial expression of suffering to a wonderful degree. There is an undoubted look of agony in

that upturned face. His passion is faithfully portrayed."

"O that I might faithfully portray His passion—not in wood, but in flesh and blood!" exclaimed Herman with fervor.

"And so that ambition still possesses you?"

"Yes, possesses me wholly. I think of it by day and night. I am devoted to realizing it. I give much time to meditation and prayer. Tell me, do you think the stigmata will be given me?"

"The stigmata!" he mused. "And so that appeal I made a few weeks since when in my discourse I referred to the 'marks of the Lord Jesus' was not a passing whim, the fanciful impulse of your mystic nature?"

"I never spoke more seriously than then. Did you not assure me of

your interest and your intercession?" said Herman through lips drawn white with deep feeling.

"And I cautioned you that it was asking for a miracle, that the faith that claims miracles is unusual. And I believe I warned you against pride."

"It is possible. The stigmata are possible."

"Yes."

"Think of the place we give in our community life to the Passion. Does it seem unreasonable that God might honor one of our number thus?"

There was a protest as well as persuasion in Herman's voice—protest against the apparent doubt that challenged his faith. He was quick to see that without the cooperation of his pastor and religious teacher the longing of his heart would not be satisfied. It grieved him to

feel that his secret passion poured so earnestly into the bosom of this friend had evidently not impressed him as he thought. Perhaps the few weeks since that confession had been made served to erase it partially. Perhaps it had been put down as the irresponsible enthusiasm of youth. What should he say to enlist the powerful influence of the priest in his behalf?

The thoughtful silence was broken by the priest.

"God forbid that I should hinder the faith of any of my people," he said half to himself, as though it was the summing up of his secret thought. "Herman, my son, do not think me inconsiderate of your aims or interests."

The young man yielded to his tenderness, came closer and took the outstretched hand.

"I have told you that what you ask is possible, but it is given to few. I am proud to think your faith in God's power is so strong. When you spoke to me before, I thought it an impulse soon to be dismissed. Now I see the encouragement I gave you then has grown into a fixed purpose. You are a mystic by temperament and have ever been serious-minded. If the stigmata were given to any, I would suppose that your type of life would most probably be the recipient of the great favor. Think what it would mean—to the village, to you! Why, Herman, my enthusiasm kindles as I contemplate it. But think of the responsibility it involves. Have you measured that? No wonder your soul has been deeply moved as you have considered what this miracle would accomplish for us all.

What have you done to bring it to pass?"

"I have read, I have prayed. I have sought to make myself worthy. What more can I do?"

"What more?" and the priest arose and began pacing to and fro. It seemed to recall the purpose of his visit. "I came to-day," he said, "to make a proposal, to extend an invitation. I thought the subject of your ambition might be referred to, but hardly expected we would plunge so immediately into its discussion. I confess this settled conviction of yours takes hold of me. Your theory that the chief part in the Play should be taken by the most fit is reasonable. It is also reasonable to believe that if some miraculous sign is given, it will rest on the one who had the completest preparation along with his spiritual qualifications. Like

a true mystic you are depending upon faith and prayer. While these are necessary, would it not be well to consider some human equipment? For example, you know that in several of the groupings of the Play the outlines of certain great masterpieces are followed. There are the 'Last Supper,' by Da Vinci, and 'The Descent from the Cross,' by Rubens, and others. Seek out these great canvases. Study them. Absorb their message. Feel what the artist felt when he sought to portray the Passion. You have never been far from home. It would do you good to break up this monotonous life of yours, this too morbid introspection. Get out into the great cities, worship in the wonderful cathedrals, touch human life in some of its aspects that are strange to you. A few weeks, or even months

away would broaden and enlarge your whole life. Then, I have been thinking of this: the thing you seek is a doctrine of the Church. Do not seek it alone, if you are determined to seek it. Enlist the Church's aid. Do not count on such feeble help as I can give, but confide your secret to those who are wiser and better than I. If your petition is just—let the Church's blessing be upon it. Would not that increase the probability of success? And now, this is my errand. I am going to Rome next week. It is in the business of the Church. But I always think of a trip to Rome as a privilege and pleasure. Come and go with me. You shall be my guest. And for you the journey shall be a pilgrimage."

"O, my dear friend," exclaimed Herman in an outburst of emotion. "How can I thank you? A pil-

grimage to Rome! Saint Peter's! The Vatican! The pope!"

"Yes. You shall see all this—and more. You will get some idea of the greatness of Christianity. You shall see the people that next year will come to see us. It will be an education. And now I must go. Farewell, my son. Come and see me to-night and we will make our plans for the trip."

So saying, he was gone.

Herman stood as if dazed by the sudden splendor that had burst upon him. His face was radiant. His eyes were moist. He saw in that pilgrimage to Rome and in the blessing of the pope the gift of God coming a little closer. Yes, it would come. It was a part of the Church's faith. It was his faith. It would come.

He held the crucifix before him and prayed.

V

"IN ROME ALSO"

OVER the Alps and into Italy they went together. As the train sped on its winding way amid wooded hills, through mountains, villages, around rocky promontories, in sight of snow and ice, down the slope and on to the South Land, none of the beauties of the trip were lost to the young man. With sensitive soul, alert to all of nature's moods, he reveled in the panoramic display of color and form in the landscape. The desolate crags that lifted their sharp outline against the sky and the flowers that bloomed in the grass of the valleys, the rush of the train mingled with the music of swirling mountain brooks and rivers, the big world of activity into

which he was making auspicious entrance, and the answering excitement and expectation—all these contributed to make the soul of Herman happy.

His pastor's mind was on other things. Here was a young man whom he knew to be upright and true. Like other youths of Oberammergau, he wanted to be the Christus in the Passion Play. He had character and ability. He would in all probability come to that honor in due time. But as to the election to the chief place in but a few months for the season of next year—that was improbable. Yet here he was expecting it, expecting it through an unusual procedure, a divine intervention in his behalf. He had taken the impulse from a sermon, had been encouraged and at the same time cautioned. His de-

sire had grown to a purpose, his purpose to a passion. How should a true, religious guide deal with such a soul in such a struggle? To oppose him gave offense and might undermine the foundations of his faith. To agree with him and encourage his hope was impossible without sincerity. The thing Herman was asking might not be too great for his own faith, but it was for the pastor's. How should he prepare the young man for a disappointment that seemed inevitable?

"It is a pilgrimage indeed," spoke Herman. The day was drawing to a close, the shadows lengthening.

"Any journey for our Lord is a pilgrimage, Herman." And then he added, thoughtfully, "And service rendered in His name and for His sake is sacramental."

"Most pilgrimages in the past

have been for the advantage of the pilgrim." There was a hidden meaning in the remark that the pastor did not fail to see.

"For self, for the glory of God!—it is not always easy for the Christian to draw the line between these two."

"Is it not the glory of God that he works miracles in a human life?" inquired the young man.

"Yes, and the shame of that human life is that it often becomes boastful and proud and forgets that the miracle was wrought by God."

Herman was silent.

"My son," said the priest, after a few moments of thoughtfulness, "what will you think, what will you do if the miracle you expect is not performed?"

"I expect it to be performed"—the answer was given quickly. "I

have the faith. The Church holds it is possible. At your suggestion, we now journey to Rome. I feel already that my soul is to be thrilled with what I shall see. Here is the head of the Church. Here is the center of spiritual life. I accept the reproof you gave me the other day. I think I may have depended too much on myself. Now the Church's powerful influence is to be enlisted. I do not expect any special dispensation, but I am confident that the very fact of worshiping in Saint Peter's, of knowing myself in the center of Christianity's triumphs will be sufficient to work the miracle. Surely, this pilgrimage will commend me afresh to the favor of God. Those who honor His Church He will honor."

It was the same passionate torrent of feeling and confident expect-

tation that had burst forth before. Apparently nothing could shake his faith. He would have to learn by experience its limitations, as well as its possibilities.

"I shall leave you much to yourself while in Rome. My duties will take me in several directions and occupy much of my time. You can wander about the city at will. There is much to see. Each historic location carries its own message. I know you will not fail to be impressed with the Church's power. It is so great that it gives one a sense of the individual's unimportance. We shall go to Saint Peter's and the Vatican to-morrow. I have made arrangements. Here is the money for your personal expenses when I am not with you. These are days of opportunity. Make the most of them."

So the frank disapproval of Herman's quest was postponed. He had brought him to the Eternal City to break up that mood, that secret passion, that unnatural desire; and judging from Herman's words, he had only strengthened it. The pilgrimage was to make the prize more certain in the young man's opinion. Perhaps time would help solve the perplexing problem. And then another thing caused him to hesitate—what if Herman were right?

The next morning flooded the earth with its bounty of sunshine and warmth. Through the streets of the city went these two. They crossed the Tiber and came to Saint Peter's. They paused before the esplanade as the magnificent view burst upon them. In the foreground rose the great obelisk in

stately grace, one time the witness of those atrocities committed against the Christians at Nero's circus. On either side great fountains sent their sparkling flood into the morning light, the mists encircling each swaying gently in the breeze and reflecting the colors of the rainbow. Semi-circular colonnades swept majestically around the whole and led up a series of steps to the wonderful Temple, topped with its splendid dome.

Crossing this space and approaching the portals, the proportions of the façade seemed to lift and expand, the columns increased in girth and stood like giant sentinels supporting the structure. Passing within, the surprise was overwhelming, and Herman wept as he bowed before this amazing shrine.

How can his impressions and emo-

tions be described? His mind and heart, ever responsive to the influences from without, were here aglow with thought and feeling. The towering ceilings, the spanning archways, the paneled supports, the long distances where designs of color blended into a harmonious whole, the vast spaces through which were heard the intonations of the priest before some chapel altar or the rolling notes of a great organ, the mosaics, the paintings, the entablature, the carvings, the marble forms, and under the lofty dome the tomb of the blessed saint, each in turn held him in thrall; and all combined to transport him to realms of the ideal. Here he felt the fellowship of the saints. Here, even as his friend had said, he felt the greatness of Christianity. Here he dwelt in admiration upon the work of artists

in color and stone. It seemed that in a place so vast in area and ample in design there was room for all the select of earth. Here in the great cathedral he entered a confessional and told his secret hope. Remembering the suggestion of his father in the faith, he poured out his longing for the stigmata. From it he came, looking upon the palms of his hands, the words he had heard echoing in his heart:

"It is reserved for those who are worthy."

Shall we prolong the record of his disappointment? It was with a sickening sense of defeat that he left the Vatican and the great cathedral, his expectation unfulfilled. Alone now, he went over it all again. This was Rome, Saint Peter's—yes, they did overshadow the individual. How far away seemed his

little village in the Bavarian hills, how inconsequential his own life, and yet—yet, there was the Passion Play, and the selection of the players. There was his own ambition that he believed could be attained by this method to which he had been drawn with such definite inclination. In spite of prayers unanswered and hope deferred he would trust on. It was the surest way to his goal. Perhaps it would yet come—even in Rome.

It was now his last day in the imperial city. The spell of the past was on him. He wandered amid the broken columns, the crumbling altars, the scattered pavement and the spoiled glory of the Forum. Deserted now, it had once been the center of teeming life and activity, the Capitol of the world. Recalling such names and incidents as he could, he passed to the ruins of the

Coliseum. It arose around him gaunt and bare, casting spectral shadows and speaking eloquently, even in its silence, of that Roman civilization. He imagined again the seats full of the city's rabble, the sands of the arena wet with blood. He heard the cry, "The Christians to the lions!" and shuddered as he remembered the price the early Church had paid for the faith.

Could he suffer for his faith? Yes. Was he not eager to represent the Christ? Once more, yes. But how? He had felt a thrill of awe yesterday when at Saint John Lateran he had climbed the Scala Sancta on his knees, repeating the formulas of the Church. He remembered the story that these marble stairs were once in Pilate's Judgment Hall, and down them the Son of God was led, thorn-crowned and persecuted, by

wicked men. The Passion of Christ! O the agony of that week! What suffering!—broken-hearted He died! In Herman's meditation the words of Paul came to him: "That I may know Him and the fellowship of His sufferings."

He arose quickly and left the place. He would not allow himself to believe his quest was unworthy. He *was* sincere—he said it again, and again. And he *would* succeed—he said that too. That his idea of representing Christ to the world in the Play was mechanical and superficial had occurred to him more than once, but it was consumed by the passion of his ambitions. Rome, in which he had hoped to achieve the marks of distinction, had instead challenged his right to them. Therefore he hurried along the streets as if to escape some dreadful fate.

Back in Oberammergau he should be himself again.

"Faith and prayer will bring it," he was saying to himself. "Here the Church is too big to heed the appeal of one so obscure. Wait until the marks are given and the Church shall write me down a saint."

A bony hand was stretched before him as he passed and a beggar's pitiful plaint reached his ears. He hurried on heedlessly. That night in his dreams that same hand was stretched before him again, and as he looked into the palm—behold! it was pierced. He heard a voice: "Inasmuch as ye have done it not unto one of the least of these, ye have done it not unto me," and as he looked the beggar's rags became garments of glistening white and the vision vanished.

Herman found himself sitting star-

ing into the dark, a cold sweat upon his brow. What did it all mean? Was he a beggar? Had it really come? Trembling he struck a light.

No.

"Are you restless, Herman?" It was the voice of the priest, who had been aroused.

"Yes."

"To-morrow we leave Rome."

"I am glad."

VI

"HE THAT EXALTETH
HIMSELF"

BACK once more in his native valley, the passion of Herman was revived. All around him were the reminders of the Passion Play. To be a part of it and thus interpret the Last Week of the Lord was an impulse inherited by centuries of community life, and now strengthened by the growing ambitions of his youth. As the summer wore on there were many signs of activity looking to the coming season. Housewives inspected their linen and paint freshened the appearance of each street. The theater and all the paraphernalia of the stage were thoroughly refurbished. Agents from the outside world made

frequent trips of investigation and inquiry. The time for the selection of players was drawing near. It was the commonest topic of conversation. Always Herman was spoken of as a young man of real piety and of unusual talent. Wherever he would be placed he would play his part with credit. He was justly popular and had a host of friends. But others of equal talent and piety were named for chief parts. Certain traditions and precedents were unfavorable to the young man. None knew this better than himself. It served to emphasize anew the importance of that special sign of favor he coveted. The hope of receiving the stigmata had by no means been abandoned. Indeed, he had once thought the Church was ready to honor him if the gift were given. The trip to Rome

benefited him. While he had been practically baffled in his quest and for a time was sorely disappointed, he recognized that the outlook upon the great world which the pilgrimage had afforded him had furnished new perspectives for his life. Even that dream was taken not as a reproof, but as an encouragement. If the bony hand of a beggar received the stigmata, should not his that had ever been devoted to honest toil? Though the gift seemed intolerably postponed and though the pastor had cautioned him many times, his faith still held to the simple possibility, and was steadfast.

"Abandon the idea of a miracle being performed in your behalf," the priest had said one day. "It will surely bring you disappointment."

"Then you have no faith," replied

Herman, sadly. "Did you not tell me you would pray for me."

"Yes, my son."

"Then pray for me that my faith fail not," and as he spoke there was such a note of sincerity in his voice, such purity in his face, such reverence in his manner that it seemed a sacrilege to challenge his quest.

Under the influence of this passion the life of Herman had undoubtedly been elevated. While there was an element of selfishness in his aim, thought upon this was reduced to a minimum of consideration since in Oberammergau ambitions of this kind were inbred and natural. If the selection of the Christus was to rest upon the one most fit, it was a struggle to be most fit in the opinion of those who had the power of selection; and if this involved the enlistment of spiritual forces and a

miraculous sign, then he was most fit who could summon this assistance through prayer and faith. None could expect to wield these forces but he of blameless life, and measured by all the ordinary standards of character Herman was blameless. All this he believed. None but his pastor knew his secret hope.

"Do you recall a conversation we had last spring concerning the selection of players?" asked Herman as he worked in the shop one day in late summer.

"I remember it very well," answered the master-workman.

"By this time what do you think of the principle of selection I favored then? I argued that character should be the determining factor in obtaining place and position."

"I believe in it with all my heart," said the older man, warmly.

Then, laying aside his work, he drew near Herman and spoke impressively. "You are right in calling it a principle. It is that. It is a law, a process that works throughout the whole world and not alone in our little village. Character is, after all, the determining factor. The sifting goes on constantly. No one who is worthy can be permanently defeated, and none who is unworthy can ultimately succeed. There are advancements and failures that at times seem unfair. But in the end merit tells. I think that if position and place are in the power of men to give, God still controls the balance of power by influencing their opinions. The words of our Lord in the parable have application not only in the world to come but here. 'Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.' "

Herman did not answer.

"When we apply this principle to the selection of players, asking God's guidance in our choices, the whole community should feel at rest with the results. I believe last spring you spoke of the uncertainty of the outcome and the possibility of wrong motives. But if we ask for guidance, each should take his place with a belief in providential appointment to it."

The time of the election of players was now close at hand. It was necessary that the parts be assigned and practice begun during the winter months for the coming season. Already the tang of autumn was in the air and here and there was the color of flaming shrubbery amid the dark pines of the surrounding mountains.

And now an accident befell the

home of Herman. In coming down the mountain path, Herman's father, carrying a heavy load, slipped and fell. The strong man had scarcely ever known sickness or misfortune. Now he was stretched upon his bed, groaning in pain. In falling, the load he carried had crushed him. There was some internal injury, some wrenching of tissue and ligaments. The relief furnished him by the physician and the deft fingers of his devoted wife, Herman's mother, seemed but temporary. Repeatedly the agony came back, causing the cold sweat to start, the face to wince, the hands to clutch the coverlid. It was a trying time—and so unexpected. Herman rendered such help as he could, but he felt awkward and inexperienced. The necessities at home had drawn him from his work at the shop.

He had not confided to his parents his secret passion because he felt it would not especially assist in its realization, and to surprise them with the wonder of the sign might add to the bliss they would feel. While the young man gave of time and strength in this emergency, there was a lurking resentment in his heart that now, when above all times he should be free to think and pray and seek the coveted gift, he should be occupied with this care. It was with resolution, therefore, that he told his mother one evening that he would watch with his father that night and attend his wants, while she should have a night of unbroken rest. So he kissed her and bade her sleep well. Assuring his father that he would be within call, smoothing the cover and turning the light low, he came into the living room.

The hour of struggle had come. The night watches were to be devoted to this holy quest. He was alone. Replenishing the grate he sat before the open fire reading again—how many times had he gone over it?—the story of Saint Paul, Saint Francis and the holy men of old. He remembered that morning when the pastor had called for those of Oberammergau who might “bear in their body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” He recalled the vivid impression it had made upon him and how the pastor’s explanation had seemed to him the sure method of personal success. All the intervening months, the experiences and disappointments had not shaken his conviction that it must be a gift, a divinely wrought miracle. The time at hand when his faith must be honored or aban-

done, his soul was wrought to an intensity of feeling hitherto unfelt, his passion a frenzy of zeal. He walked the floor. He looked long and lovingly upon a crucifix that hung upon the wall. He prayed. The hours went by, his desires still glowing white-hot. Not so the embers of the grate, they fell amid a shower of sparks and gave the solitary light now in the room. The night was dark, the house silent. Still Herman prayed. Still he claimed the gift. At last he sat before the fire, his hands extended to receive it. He had done all he could. He had prayed and pledged his devotion to the God he worshiped and the Church that had nurtured his faith. He sank back in physical exhaustion. He closed his eyes. He had done all he could. And then, quietly, strangely, mys-

teriously there seemed to close in upon him a night more black than that without, a night that was starless, a night with no promise of dawn. He felt himself falling, falling, falling! Was this death? He let himself go. He had done all he could. He seemed alone—alone in the universe. He was forgotten, forsaken. Suddenly an agony of emotion shot through him. All was silent, and then far away he heard a voice:

“Herman, thy prayer is answered—the gift is thine! But since thou art still of earth, remember it is given thee in trust.”

There was a sound of wings in the air, a fading strain of music celestial.

Slowly Herman opened his eyes. There were the glowing embers in the grate. One fell and among the

sparks a flame flared up. He leaned forward and looked upon his upturned hands. There was a black line in each palm! The stigmata! "The marks of the Lord Jesus." The sign of His Passion!

"The gift is thine," the voice had said.

He could scarcely believe what he saw. He closed his fingers over each palm and then extended them again. Still the marks remained. They were his. His faith was triumphant. Remembering the past months of penance and petition, of secret struggle in solitude, and thinking now of the prize obtained, all the long vigil seemed but a dream. The study and exaction of the anxious days were worth while, for his prayers were answered! He looked again upon his hands. Once more he closed the fingers over each palm.

With it there came a sense of possession. The marks were now his own. Again—yes, they were there yet. What had the voice said?

“Herman, thy prayer is answered, the gift is thine. Since—” Since what? There was something else, but it was indistinct—forgotten. Was it not enough to have heard, “The gift is thine”?

The joy of victory began to thrill his heart. His belief had been honored of heaven, and now he would be honored of men! His faith had been vindicated. Now the committee would acknowledge the claim he had to the chief role. They could not refuse to recognize a miracle—and in the vista of the near future he saw himself the center of a great throng. What if he were young! He had the stigmata! The Church would write him down

a saint. He was to go down in history along with Saint Paul and Saint Francis. His renown for piety would spread. His next journey to Rome would be a triumphal one.

What would his pastor say?

At the thought he quickly arose. He must tell him at once. He closed his fingers over each palm as though to hold the precious possession fast. Hastening from the half-lit room into the dark street, he heard his father groan. But he hurried on. The priest must know. Now he could act in the interest of this favored member of the Church. The miracle must be proclaimed. The memory of that cry of pain from his father's room caused him to hasten. Perhaps he should have waited. No. The priest must be roused. He ran swiftly along the street, across the bridge.

There arose the great theater—it would soon be the scene of his triumph. On through the sleeping village he sped. Panting, he stopped at the priest's door. He still gripped each hand.

"Who is there?" called the pastor, from within, who was roused by the running foot-falls.

"Herman! It is Herman! O, let me in! I have a message. Quickly. I must tell you," was the answer, given with an excitement there was no attempt to suppress.

The door was swung open.

The young man passed quickly across the threshold and paused. His figure and face were flooded with the light of the room. He stood erect, a picture framed by the outline of the door whose background was the night out of which he had just come. The fingers of

each hand were tightly clasped, his posture almost suggesting defiance. But there was a tremulous ecstasy about his bearing, as though a soul *en rapport* with some inner vision was about to make disclosure of the wonderful secret.

"What is it? Are you in trouble?" It was the voice of the priest that broke the silence.

A smile of mingled triumph and tenderness appeared, and Herman spoke impulsively while a mystic note crept into his voice.

"O, no! My trouble is past. My struggles are now a thing of yesterday. O, my friend, my friend! Faith has triumphed. My prayers are answered. The stigmata have been given. I have come to tell you—to show you. Now I shall have my wish. Now the committee must honor me with the chief part

in the Play. Now I shall pass into history as one of the saints of the Church. To-night the marks were given. I could not wait. Behold!—" and he stretched forth his open hands before the priest.

The priest looked upon each palm and then into the face of Herman suffused with joy and pride. Again he looked upon the hands spread before him. Once more into the young man's face.

"I see nothing," he spoke gently.

"See nothing?" exclaimed Herman. "Look! 'The marks of the Lord Jesus.' Do you mean to say this miracle is nothing? Must you be told that one whom God has honored stands before you? Do you not understand what this means? They came this night. They came in answer to prayer. Do you not see?"

"If they came by prayer, they have been lost by pride. Look for yourself, my son."

He looked.

The marks were gone.

Herman grew white, staggered—and fell at his pastor's feet.

VII

"HE THAT HUMBLETH
HIMSELF"

AFTER several moments Herman opened his eyes. His pastor was bending over him. He was startled.

"Why, where am I? What has happened? O—" He looked at his hands. "The marks are gone! My God! My God! What shall I do?"

"Be calm, my son. Let me help you arise. There! Now tell me about this strange visit in the night."

"O, how can I bear it? The stigmata given!—lost! I prayed and received—and then they were taken away!" and his frame was shaken with emotion. His head rested on his hands, his elbows on his knees.

He was a picture of deepest despair.

"Are you sure?" asked his friend.

"Sure?" Herman lifted his face, the eyes red with weeping, the hair disheveled, a look of defiance in every line. "Sure? Certainly I am sure. Did I not see them?—Not once, but many times. I prayed. They were given. I heard a voice from eternity speak to me. It said: 'Herman, thy prayer is answered, the gift is given. Since'"—he paused in his thought, a new seriousness swept over his countenance, and then he continued in more subdued tones—" 'Since thou art still of earth—remember—remember—it is given—thee—in—trust.' " His head bent forward to his hands again, and again he wept.

The minister knelt by his side. He said nothing for a time, but the

silence was full of sympathy and pitying love. He knew something of the struggle through which the young man had passed. He had tried to guide him. Finally he spoke with tenderness, laying a hand on his shoulder:

“Herman—your sorrow is great. I pity you with all my heart. I do not chide you. I think I have been a poor religious guide. I tried to break up this mood. And seeing you were determined, I cautioned you against pride and selfishness. Your unhesitating faith has been beautiful to see. But—do you not remember? I have warned you against the tempers of the world that spoil the fruits of the spirit. You will come to see that your quest was essentially selfish. This disappointment must be meant to teach you a lesson. Do not let it

embitter you. Receive the discipline and remember the love of our God never fails."

As a fire that dies sometimes sends up a last flickering flame momentarily, so the passion of Herman started again, rebellion and submission mingling in his voice.

"I wanted—the first place!"

"He that exalteth himself shall be abased," quoted the pastor, and as the young man sighed heavily, he added, "and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Herman arose. "I must go," he said. "I was watching by my father to-night and I fear I have been from him too long. I heard him groan as I left. I must hurry back. Farewell."

But his feet dragged heavily. His steps resounded from the walls of each building. His soul was weighted

with the awful load of loss. The words of the pastor echoed within him and he knew they were true: "You have lost it through pride." "He that exalteth himself—" He was compelled to acknowledge that he had been selfish, grossly so. His personal ambition stood out in bold antagonism to the gentle reproof and faithful counsel of his religious guide. It seemed strange to him now that he had been so persistent. He paused on the little bridge and listened to the music of the waters. Yonder the black outline of the mountains was silhouetted against the starlit sky. As he looked up the wonder of the heavens filled him with a sense of his own insignificance. Thinking of the expanses of the universe, the greatness of God, the mysteries of His providence in dealing with the human race,

the sacredness of Christ and the Church, the ambition that had come to mean so much to him in recent days loosened its hold upon his thought and desire. He began to see that he had been presumptuous, daring, reckless. Who was he to ask such a boon from heaven? What right had he to claim favoritism from God? No wonder that the blessing given was soon withdrawn.

"It is given thee in trust," the voice had said, and Herman chided himself that he had forgotten that most important message, and then as he thought more seriously of the responsibility involved in the gift, he saw clearly how unworthy he was. There was once a man stricken dead because he had presumed to touch the Ark of God with irreverent hand, and Herman was filled with a sense of shame as he thought how

sacrilegious had been the passion of his life, how self-centered all his thought, how superficial his ideas of portraying Christ to the world. Even the Passion Play in that hour seemed a poor mechanical device, a vain show before curious crowds. As a great religious drama and as an interesting survival of mediævalism, it would probably remain as a part of their village life, but saving virtues it had none. It was a play—and with Christ it was work, work with sweat and blood. *His* passion was a reality; they could at best claim but a theatrical representation. In that hour of midnight meditation, under the stars alone, Herman began to understand that the forces of the Church are not in theatricals, organization, worldly pomp and pageantry, but in the conquering truths of righteous-

ness. He felt the passion of Christ to be a great spiritual struggle with the powers of evil. He learned that his pastor was nearest right when he had said the "marks of the Lord Jesus" were traits of character. He saw now that his contention for character as a condition for the players admitted a much wider interpretation, even as the master had said it was the test that ran all through life. To represent Christ now assumed proportions far greater than anything he had dreamed before. His spiritual longings, his prayers, his penance, and his pilgrimage had once been that he might be personally honored; now all spiritual aspirations and attainments were for the service of humanity and to increase the sum of virtue and happiness in the world. To know the fellowship of Christ's suf-

fering meant to share with Him the sorrows of others, to get under the burden of the earth's woes and help lift a sinful race toward God.

"O how selfish I have been! Forgive, O Lord, and teach me to serve Thee with new purpose and pure motive."

As though in answer to the prayer, his mind turned to his father. A moment later he was approaching his home hurriedly. There was a light there. His mother's shadow passed the window. He had not kept his promise to her. The remembrance of this and of his father's need quickened his footsteps. Here was human pain and suffering—how could he bring relief? Here was opportunity for service—what could he do? Why had he not seen it before? Why had his heart been so selfish?

Soon he was by the bedside. A new desire took possession of him. It was to help, to serve. More eager solicitude than he had ever known for even his parents now came upon him. His voice was tender with sympathy. He murmured words of affection and encouragement. His touch was gentle. Side by side he labored with his mother, and their labor was rewarded as relief and slumber came to the one they loved. As he worked he saw in his father and mother a beauty of character that he had not appreciated before. How truly they had given themselves to him. Could he ever repay them? And beyond this little room was the wide, wide world. It was full of misery and sin. His love was now released from the bondage of self-interest. At once it felt the challenge

of human need. Surely, no life was a worthy one that did not serve.

Then came the morning.

There was a knock at the door, and their priest and pastor entered.

They stood together in the little room. Herman spoke, his voice vibrant with feeling, his manner contrite.

"Mother, forgive me for being untrue to my promise. Father, I am sorry I was not more attentive to your needs last night. I heard you call when I left the house, but was then intent on carrying a message to the pastor in my own interest. I think—I lost—the marks—when I went on—heedless," and his eyes filled with tears.

"What is it, my child? I do not understand," said his mother, coming nearer and looking earnestly into his face.

"I will tell you all"—and then he began at the first and recited to them the story of his struggle. He unfolded it in all its graphic details. As he came to tell the events of that night, his visit to the parish house, his loss of the stigmata, he did not spare himself. He confessed his selfishness.

"The pastor has reproved me in the words of our Lord—'He that exalteth himself shall he abased.' My humiliation is deserved. Now I begin to see that those who interpret the Passion of Christ to the world must actually suffer—it is not a drama, it is life."

"Herman, my dear boy," murmured his mother as she put her arm about him and caressed his tear-stained face, now illuminated with an inner light. "You have had a struggle indeed. We have

been ambitious that you obtain a prominent place"—she spoke guardedly—"but, but we would rather have you good than great. When you were little I used to hold you close to my heart and look into your eyes. I was so proud of you—God's gift to us. You were innocent of evil, so trustful, so happy, so thoughtful and good. But I was never more proud of you than I am now."

His father reached for Herman's hand and pressed it to his lips, the silent act being full of confidence and affection.

"Thanks for your forgiveness," said Herman. "Out of this experience has come a deeper purpose to interpret Christ to men—not before curious audiences, but to all I meet, not once in a decade, but in every act of life."

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The pastor laid his hands on Herman's shoulders and looking into his eyes, said, "Who so shall humble himself as a little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of God."

The room was filled with the soft and gracious light of the morning sun, and in the soul of Herman there was a great peace.

